

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS BRANDON T. PICKERING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to a fallen soldier from Kentucky who was lost in battle. PFC Brandon T. Pickering of Fort Thomas, KY, died on April 10, 2011, in Germany from wounds sustained on April 8 in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, when enemy combatants attacked his unit with small arms fire and a rocket-propelled grenade. He was 21 years old.

For his service in uniform, Private First Class Pickering received several awards, medals, and decorations, including the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the NATO Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

Says Tammy Moore, Brandon's mother:

To know Brandon was to know love and laughter.

When Brandon was boarding the plane to go back to Afghanistan, he turned and looked at me and I thought, "My God, my son's a man." It was the first time I looked at him and didn't see him as my little boy.

Brandon grew up in Fort Thomas, in northern Kentucky and attended Woodfill Elementary, Highlands Middle School, and Highlands High School. As a kid growing up he loved to fish and played baseball and football. Brandon also practiced tae kwon do as a kid, and he earned his black belt by age 10.

Brandon's high school classmates and teachers remember him as an unassuming student with a big heart, a good sense of humor, and a dedication to helping others.

Says Highlands High School principal Brian Roberts:

As a school, we join the Fort Thomas community and the family in mourning his loss.

Says former high school classmate Stephanie Orleck:

Even on bad days, I was always able to turn to Brandon to bring out a smile on my face.

Brandon also had a mischievous side. His mother recalls:

Brandon loved a good prank. In high school he decided it would be funny to place a mouse trap in another student's locker. When the principal called him, he admitted it right away.

That was the worst trouble Brandon ever gave his parents.

As a teenager, Brandon also enjoyed the freedom that came with his driver's license.

While teaching Brandon how to drive, he told me, "Mom, I know you don't want to hear this, but this is the happiest I've ever been."

I told him, "Brandon, I know you don't want to hear this, but this is the most scared I've ever been!"

After graduating high school in 2008, Brandon attended Cincinnati State.

Tammy recalls:

After two semesters, he told me he was thinking of joining the Army. I asked him to give school another semester and if he still felt the same, I would support his decision. The third semester came and went, and Brandon was firm on his decision.

He enlisted and in September 2009 he left for basic training at Fort Benning, GA. After basic training he was stationed at Fort Polk, LA.

Tammy said:

There was a small town outside of Fort Polk named Pickering; Brandon thought that was neat and so did I.

Brandon was an only child, but when he got to Fort Polk he found brothers.

Assigned to Fort Polk in April of 2010, Brandon was assigned to the 1st Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. He was soon deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom in October of 2010. Part of a two-man machinegun team, Brandon was 6 months into his first combat tour when he was fatally wounded.

Brandon was flown to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany before he died. Because of this, his family was able to be with him before he passed away.

Brandon made one final gift by volunteering to be an organ donor. His final sacrifice was an offering of life for four Germans, including a 6-year-old girl.

Tammy said:

Even in his death, Brandon saved the lives of four people.

I often wondered how I could have raised such a wonderful human being and then I think, only by the grace of God.

The Fort Thomas, KY, road where Brandon grew up was fittingly renamed in his honor as a permanent reminder of his life and his deeds. The portion of River Road in Fort Thomas that runs from State Route 8 along the Ohio River to South Fort Thomas Avenue next to the Cincinnati VA Medical Center is now named the Private First Class Brandon T. Pickering Memorial Highway.

We are thinking of Brandon's family as I recount his story for my Senate colleagues, including his mother Tammy Moore, his father David Pickering, his grandfather Thomas Pickering, and many other beloved family members and friends.

Brandon was laid to rest with full military honors at the Alexandria Cemetery in Alexandria, KY. His tombstone bears the words, "Live a life worthy of my sacrifice."

Tammy had some final thoughts on the words that mark her son's grave.

People should think about that—not just for my son, but for all the sons and daughters, and the ones in the past.

What people have sacrificed to keep this country free—freedom isn't free, and it's not cheap. It comes at a high cost, and we all have a responsibility to each other and to this nation.

I couldn't agree more with Tammy Moore's thoughts, and I want her to know that this Senate certainly does

recognize the responsibility we have as a nation to honor and always remember the sacrifices of brave heroes like her son, PFC Brandon T. Pickering. We are in awe of his life of service, and we are humbled by his final sacrifice. From Germany to Afghanistan to Fort Thomas, we can see the lives he touched and the people he left better off for having known him.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, for debate only, until 10:30 a.m., with the time equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am looking at the clock, and I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be able to continue in morning business for up to 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WELCOMING THE GUEST
CHAPLAIN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD will show the introduction of and prayer by our visiting Chaplain today, Father Claude Pomerleau of Portland, OR, a member of the Holy Cross priests. That is as much of a thumbnail as saying any one of us is a U.S. Senator, period. There is a lot more to it.

Claude Pomerleau has been nearly 50 years a priest. I know because he is my brother-in-law, and my wife Marcelle and I, as well as his wonderful parents, Phil and Cecile Pomerleau, joined him in Rome nearly 50 years ago when he was ordained a priest. My family—my parents, my brothers and sisters, and also our children—has always had such a wonderful relationship with Father Pomerleau. It is great now to see the young grandchildren come in and give him a hug and say: Hi, Uncle Claude.

I also look at his distinguished career. He is not just a brother and brother-in-law, an uncle and friend, he is a man who has taught, speaks many languages, and who has a Ph.D. from the University of Denver. He teaches now at the University of Portland even in semiretirement and also in Santiago, where he is a well-respected visiting professor, and where I am told his Spanish is like that of a native.

He was born in Vermont. His parents are French Canadians, two people who strongly practiced their religion, believed in it, and brought up their children speaking French at home. They instilled in him the values that really make our country great and make a human being even greater.